



11-26-1971

Edward Flutot (November 26, 1971)

C. Richard Arena

Oral History Interview

with

MR. EDWARD FLUTOT

November 26, 1971
Whittier, California

By Dr. C. Richard Arena

For the Richard Nixon Oral History Project

- ARENA: This is an interview with Mr. Edward Flutot of Whittier, California. Today is November 26, 1971, Arena interviewing in Whittier, California. Mr. Flutot, could I begin by asking you where and when you were born?
- FLUTOT: I was born in Glendale, California, in 1911. I moved to Whittier in 1919.
- ARENA: Was your father born in this area? Was he a California resident?
- FLUTOT: No. My father was born in New York and my mother was born in Minnesota. They both moved here in 1909.
- ARENA: Do you mind if I ask what your father's occupation was?
- FLUTOT: He worked for Parmalee Dohrmann's in Los Angeles [California]. He was a supervisor.
- ARENA: Is the company still in existence and what did they do?
- FLUTOT: No. It's Dohrmann now. Parmalee got out. It was a big outfit at one time.
- ARENA: What did they handle?
- FLUTOT: Household.

ARENA: Sell household goods?

FLUTOT: Hotel ware.

ARENA: When is the first time, as far as you can recall, that you met President Nixon? About the year, if you don't remember the exact year.

FLUTOT: It would be in the early twenties, but just what year . . .

ARENA: This might be of help. He moved from Yorba Linda [California] to Whittier in 1922. He was born in Yorba Linda in 1913.

FLUTOT: It would probably be at least '23, could be '24.

ARENA: I believe you were showing me a picture here of you and the President in school together. Would you mind giving as much information as you can about the picture? What year, the name of the school, the grade?

FLUTOT: This happened to be in the eighth grade at the East Whittier School on Whittier Boulevard.

ARENA: You are both standing, it so happens, side by side in the back row. At that time in the eighth grade was there one class or just that grade, in the sense that there was not more than one grade taught in the same room at the same time.

FLUTOT: This is the entire eighth grade. Just the one class and one teacher taught all the subjects except manual training-- we called it sloyd in those days, working with wood.

ARENA: Do you recall that both you and the President both took that subject together?

FLUTOT: Yes.

ARENA: Even though you might have had a different teacher, you were together in all of those courses, unless possibly there was something like music, or something where he went off and took something by himself and you took something else.

FLUTOT: No. It was all together.

ARENA: That is a picture of the sloyd class. Would that be that particular year when you and the President were together?

FLUTOT: Not this particular picture here. This was 1922. I believe that we were taking it at the same period in 1925.

ARENA: That would be the teacher there. Do you happen to recall Mr. [no record of name] Richmond?

FLUTOT: Yes.

ARENA: Do you happen to recall the teacher you did have for eighth grade, when you and the President were in the same class?

FLUTOT: Miss [Charlotte Jeffie] Gordon. She has since passed away.

ARENA: Where did you live at that time, Mr. Flutot?

FLUTOT: We lived on a ranch in East Whittier about a half a mile from here.

ARENA: Your father's work at that time?

FLUTOT: He was still working in Los Angeles.

ARENA: He commuted then from East Whittier to Los Angeles? Was that every day?

FLUTOT: Yes, every day.

ARENA: That's quite something. The roads were not what they are today.

FLUTOT: They were all dirt out in this area. Whittier Boulevard, as far as wideness and pavement went, ended right at East Whittier School. It sort of narrowed down there, and going east it was narrow.

ARENA: Do you mind if I ask you how many of these students you recognize today, from the standpoint of our possibly interviewing them also concerning the President's early period here?

FLUTOT: I recognize them, of course.

ARENA: Maybe you might recognize some whom you do know for sure where they are, if they are married, and their new name and so forth. I don't expect you'll know them all.

FLUTOT: No. I'm afraid I don't know where any of them are. This one here, Linniel Taylor, he's probably here.

ARENA: The first name is Linniel, not Lionel, Linniel?

FLUTOT: It would be the same thing. His nickname is Buck. Harriet Palmer, they are well known in this area.

ARENA: I believe I did have the pleasure of meeting her the other day. I believe she might be Mrs. Harriet Hudspeth. She and her husband were revisiting the area and I had the pleasure of interviewing her. Do you recall offhand the number of students in that picture? It's a fairly large group.

FLUTOT: I don't have the exact number. There are probably eighteen or twenty.

ARENA: Let's just check to be sure. So we see that altogether there are thirty-three persons in the picture, and one is the teacher, Miss Gordon. And you said the other gentleman is the recreation teacher, Mr. [Lewis A.] Cox. Would you recall his first name?

FLUTOT: No.

ARENA: Do you recall if he still might be in the area, Mr. Flutot?

FLUTOT: I don't know that either, if he's still around.

ARENA: How often and where were the recreation classes held? Were they held every day?

FLUTOT: Yes. Once a day there'd be a physical education period.

ARENA: Would I be correct in assuming that the eighth grade was the last grade of elementary school and then you would go on to high school?

FLUTOT: Yes.

ARENA: A graduation ceremony was held?

FLUTOT: Yes.

ARENA: What do you recall about that graduation ceremony and, in particular, if the President was on the program in any way, giving a talk, reciting a poem or anything like that?

FLUTOT: No. Nothing like that.

ARENA: Would you know if yearbooks were given for eighth grade?

FLUTOT: Yes.

ARENA: Would you happen to have one in your possession?

FLUTOT: I take that back, that was in high school. There were no books of any sort.

ARENA: No books with pictures, as they would have after that.

FLUTOT: Just a diploma.

ARENA: What do you recall about the conduct of the President to the best of your knowledge: his recitation in class, if there was any particular subject in which he seemed to do better than others, if there were subjects with which he had difficulty as you recall? Did he recite in front of the class for any reason, not just academically but possibly special reports and debates, if there were any at that time in the eighth grade? In other words, whatever you recall about what you saw the President do in the eighth grade, really.

FLUTOT: Thinking back that far on the school work, there wasn't too much recitation, really.

ARENA: You don't recall his standing in front of the class on any particular occasion in any way?

FLUTOT: Not anything special. They didn't have too much of that.

ARENA: I don't suppose any languages were started that early, say, even Latin or anything like that?

FLUTOT: No. Unfortunately they didn't teach any languages there at all except English, of course.

ARENA: How long was the school day, if you can recollect? When did school begin in the morning? Did you go home for lunch, and when it ended at the end of the day?

FLUTOT: No. I lived too far away from the school to go home at lunch time.

ARENA: Did you come by bus? Was there a school bus?

FLUTOT: Yes. We had a school bus there. In fact the first school bus was just a truck with seats along the side. I had to walk a half a mile to get to the bus. To start with, getting to school, I used to walk or ride a bicycle and later took the bus.

ARENA: Do you happen to recall ever seeing the President on the same bus? Did you pick him up at the grocery store area?

FLUTOT: No. I don't recall that at all. I lived south two miles from Richard. In those days a neighbor could be a mile or two miles away and still be a neighbor, you know.

ARENA: That was strictly a farm community.

FLUTOT: Nowadays two miles away would be a long way. You'd take your car to get there. Then a person two miles away was a neighbor.

ARENA: Do you recall going into the grocery store, you personally?

FLUTOT: Yes. Just like it was yesterday.

ARENA: Before we go into that, let's clear up as much as we can about the school experiences. I believe I cut you off about the question of time. When school began and when it ended.

FLUTOT: Offhand I don't know. Grammar school--it must have been around 8 and 9 o'clock. It would have to be between 3 and 4 o'clock in the evening.

ARENA: Were there any after school activities at that grade level? Did you stay after school for sports or any special subjects, or any special help? Was that ever done?

FLUTOT: The only ones that stayed after school for sports were those that were on the team.

ARENA: And there were teams at that level?

FLUTOT: Yes.

ARENA: Do you happen to recall if the President was on any of these teams? Did he stay after school for that?

FLUTOT: I don't recall that. He went out for sports, but about as much as I did, I think. We weren't really sports-minded as far as that goes at that time. We liked to play and all that in the games.

ARENA: Were the games or the sports against other schools at that level, do you recall? Or were they teams where you played other students in the same school?

FLUTOT: Usually with other students. There wasn't too many schools around to play with. The East Whittier School took in all of East Whittier. I don't know of any school that would be around. Of course, nowadays they go all over the place.

ARENA: Do you recall the school having anything like music lessons and maybe even a school orchestra?

FLUTOT: Yes. There was a school orchestra.

ARENA: Do you recall if the President participated in that, from your personal recollection?

FLUTOT: No. I don't recall anything special on that.

ARENA: Were there any other extracurricular activities? For example, a debating team on that level. Do you recall if debates were ever held?

FLUTOT: I don't recall any debates. There might have been but I don't recall. I know there was in high school. The only extra would be the eighth grade play, you might say. They put on a play at the end of the school year.

ARENA: Do you recall if the President was in that eighth grade play?

FLUTOT: Yes. He was one of the main characters and I was in it. When I say in it, we used to go around at recess reciting our lines together. The last minute before the play was to start, I came down sick and missed a whole week of school, the play, and the whole darned thing.

ARENA: Do you remember what the play was called and what it was about?

FLUTOT: I don't recall.

ARENA: Sure. Did it involve music in any way? Was it a musical play as some school plays tend to be? Or did it involve a historical character? It may have been around a historical incident.

FLUTOT: It was more of a romantic play, I think.

ARENA: You definitely recall that the President was in it.

FLUTOT: Yes, definitely, because I remember that like it was yesterday. We'd go on the playground and study our lines.

ARENA: Do you recall that the play was open to the community, or was it just among the students?

FLUTOT: It was an evening play. It was open to the public and to the parents.

ARENA: Do you recall how many nights it might have been put on?

FLUTOT: Just the one night.

ARENA: By the way, I want to be sure on the question of the year, that is the eighth grade? You have a picture of that? Were you in any other grades with the President at any time, whether it was in East Whittier or later on in high school?

FLUTOT: Well, yes. Of course, I started in third grade at East Whittier in 1919.

ARENA: So you and he would have been in the same grade all the time that he attended Whittier schools. Do you recall the high school years? He only attended two years at Whittier High. He had attended two years at Fullerton High.

FLUTOT: Well, yes, the Whittier High years.

ARENA: You attended Whittier High yourself, all the way through?

FLUTOT: All the way through, yes.

ARENA: Your graduating year was June of 1930, which was his.

FLUTOT: Yes.

ARENA: Let me ask some questions to jog your memory. I do want to be sure we have covered as much as we can regarding the elementary period. Was there anything else in any of the other grades in the elementary level such as a play, or anything unusual? Any emergency that you recall, whether or not you recall the President being personally involved or not?

FLUTOT: Nothing unusual.

ARENA: Any fires, for example?

FLUTOT: No fires. We had fire drills but no real fire. Nothing exciting that way.

ARENA: How about field trips? Did the class, as well as the whole school, ever make any trips to Los Angeles or do anything special like that?

FLUTOT: No. The only thing the school had was, the eighth grade had a ditch day towards the end of the year. I don't recall Richard going on it.

ARENA: What was ditch day?

FLUTOT: You just missed school.

ARENA: That was allowed? In other words, the students had a right to miss one day of school. Very interesting.

FLUTOT: Yes. We went up to the Los Angeles playground, up there in the mountains.

ARENA: Would everyone go together on this ditch day, or they just took off on their own, whatever they wanted to do?

FLUTOT: You could do anything you wanted. Most of them were up there to get in the snow. As far as anything special, Richard was one of the top students. So there is nothing outstanding other than that.

ARENA: How was that evidenced? In other words, was his name called out during graduation, or was this a kind of on-going thing that you noticed that he was good in studies? You personally saw that he was a good student or were there, maybe, gold stars given, and sometimes even the newspaper would report-- as they do today--honor students with report card results.

FLUTOT: No. They didn't do that in those days. But in recitation you can tell a good student from one that wasn't. The only thing that he wasn't exceptionally good at was sloyd.

ARENA: He was not good at sloyd?

FLUTOT: He was better working with his mind than with his hands, we'll put it that way.

ARENA: Do you remember some of the things he might have made?

FLUTOT: Yes. Towards the end our final project was an end table. I've still got mine. In fact, I'm still using mine for a telephone table.

ARENA: Were all the tables made the same way?

FLUTOT: Yes.

ARENA: Would you describe it?

FLUTOT: I can show it to you.

ARENA: I would appreciate seeing it. From the standpoint of the tape, in the sense that, what color was it?

FLUTOT: We made them out of solid oak.

ARENA: Any fancy decorations on it at all?

FLUTOT: The legs had a side that was shaped.

ARENA: To what extent were electric saws and that type of machinery used?

FLUTOT: No. It was all done by hand, by coping saw and a file and a straight saw, and sandpaper, of course, and glue and screws. I remember I had to finish Richard's for him. Like I say, I still have mine. You don't get solid wood nowadays to work with.

ARENA: Do you think that his might still be in existence? In later years, for example, do you ever recall his mentioning that to you?

FLUTOT: No.

ARENA: What was ordinarily done with the table, brought home and given to the parents?

FLUTOT: Yes.

ARENA: So, it's possible that that might still be in existence?

FLUTOT: Well, it could be.

ARENA: Yours certainly is and as you say, it's hardwood, oak. So, it still could be in existence. Do you recall the manner in which he asked you for help on that piece of work?

FLUTOT: I don't recall the manner. It's been so long now. I remember he was working on something else. Just what I don't recall now, not in sloyd but in another section of studies.

ARENA: Do you recall, regarding the help you gave him, what particular parts you contributed? What seemed to him the most difficult?

FLUTOT: That I don't recall, what the difficulties were or whether there were any difficulties.

ARENA: You were working together on it?

FLUTOT: Yes.

ARENA: Is there anything else you recall concerning this elementary era of your education? Any special projects that any of the teachers had? Sometimes students work on reports; sometimes students have special projects to which they report to the class. Again, possibly the President might have been involved in that.

FLUTOT: No. I can't remember any special reports.

ARENA: How about something like the PTA [Parent-Teacher Association]. Do you recall your parents or the President's parents visiting school on certain days? Did you ever meet the President's parents during the school period in school itself in any way?

FLUTOT: No. Never. I don't recall too much PTA activity actually at all. The only time I met his parents was at their home and at the store. We visited at their home, of course, and at the store every week, because we bought our groceries once a week, so we visited once a week then.

ARENA: Did the President recognize you from the school when you came to the store? Did he slip you, say, any extra treats, extra candy or chewing gum, or give you something for helping him on his table?

FLUTOT: No, nothing like that.

ARENA: As a matter of fact, how was the President as a school chum? Do you recall how he got along, say, with you in particular and with the other students in general? And do you recall there ever being, say, a discipline problem between him and the teachers?

FLUTOT: Never, never that. Of course, I got along with him real well and the children got along with him quite a bit. He was a little different in that I never once saw him get into any fight, which I saw other kids get into fights during recess and scrap around on the ground. But he always seemed to be above that.

ARENA: Do you recall, when you say chumming around with him, were you on the same team with him in sports and what position did he tend to play in any particular sport that stands out in your mind?

FLUTOT: Of course, the classes were small enough so when you played baseball, the whole class played. I never did play any of the rougher type. I liked basketball, baseball and soccer. Those were the three I went out for mostly.

ARENA: Soccer was played at that time?

FLUTOT: Yes.

ARENA: Soccer never seems to have made it, of course, as much as in other countries. In our own country it has never gotten close to the fame of baseball or football, and yet it was played.

FLUTOT: Yes, it was. As far as I know everybody liked it. Of course, football, what they played then was just touch football, the easygoing type.

ARENA: Do you recall to what extent there were students who were children of recent immigrants, whether they came from Mexico or Italy or from Spain or anywhere? Do you recall that there was a mixture of students of that background and even black students?

FLUTOT: I can't remember black students. There were Mexicans and Orientals. As you can see in the picture, there is one Mexican student there, I guess. But they weren't thought of being anything different.

ARENA: You don't recall that the students picked on them because they were different or anything?

- FLUTOT: No problems that way. No. One was just as likeable as the other.
- ARENA: Do you recall that they spoke with accents, whether they were Oriental or Mexican, especially if their parents were recent arrivals?
- FLUTOT: Well, I don't know how recent they would be arrivals. We knew them as students, that's all. I don't recall them ever speaking of their family life at all.
- ARENA: Were these Oriental and Mexican students living in the nearby farm areas too? They were all living in East Whittier?
- FLUTOT: Yes, all in East Whittier.
- ARENA: So they would have been some way connected with farm activity probably.
- FLUTOT: Yes.
- ARENA: I understand that quite a few people lived on the Leffingwell Ranch. Were these strictly migrant workers whose children did not attend school, or were some of them permanent and some of the students actually came from the Leffingwell Ranch, the working class, we'll say?
- FLUTOT: The ones that came migrantly never went to school that I know of. I know they worked on our ranch. We hired Mexican help there, seasonally that is. Their children never went to school that I know of, at least not to East Whittier anyway.
- ARENA: Was the Nixon grocery store a kind of gathering place as well as a shopping place? Do you know if some people tended to sit down? I don't know if there was an old pot-bellied stove, as they depict, like for the typical old country store. Was that sort of thing taking place from your recollection? When you went in did you see a group of men or women just chattering away, or was it strictly business? Did people come in, buy, and go out?

FLUTOT: As far as I know it was strictly a business. I don't recall anyone ever just standing around. There wasn't that many people around. But as far as I remember, when we went in there we were probably the only ones in there at the time. Of course, we weren't there more than a couple of hours probably.

ARENA: You wouldn't go there just to buy a bar of soap. It would usually be a weekly shopping?

FLUTOT: It would be a weekly situation, yes. You'd take a list in. You wouldn't pick it out like you do at a super-market now. You would ask Mrs. Nixon to get it for you.

ARENA: Before we do move from the elementary level to high school, I just want to be sure, is there anything I have not brought up that you can think of regarding this period, this contact with the President in the school itself? We'll get to the store, and maybe meeting him after school separately.

FLUTOT: I can't think of a thing, other than just that we were students there. Nothing special.

ARENA: Speaking about the school itself, before we do leave it, how would you describe it in your own personal recollection? Did you enjoy the teachers in general? Did you find that you looked forward to going to school, bearing in mind that you were a normal boy and everybody enjoyed a day off? In general, what are your recollections of that?

FLUTOT: I enjoyed going to school myself, personally.

ARENA: Did you find the discipline too strict or the school conditions uncomfortable from the standpoint of, maybe, the furnishings, or anything like that? You didn't feel, or did you, that you were in a rundown building, the teachers weren't on the ball? Was there any feeling like that?

FLUTOT: The teachers were real good, all the way through.

ARENA: Do you recall if the teachers lived right in the community or did they commute from outside the East Whittier area?

FLUTOT: Most of them, I believe, lived right in the community. I I don't know how they got to school, probably by automobile.

ARENA: Do you recall some of the officials' names, such as your principal at that time?

FLUTOT: Miss [Evelyn G.] Flowers was the principal.

ARENA: You don't recall her first name by any chance? What we hope to do is maybe track some of these people down for future interviews.

FLUTOT: Of course, a lot of them may not even be here.

ARENA: Yes, unfortunately.

FLUTOT: But, she was very nice.

ARENA: How would she appear, in the sense that, would she come into class from time to time, or were there assemblies that were held and she would be in charge of the assemblies, introduce people at them?

FLUTOT: No. How I got to know her pretty well was two real reasons. One, I used to like to go in the office because she had a stereopticon outfit. I used to like to look at the stereopticon slides, three-dimensional.

ARENA: These were the original ones?

FLUTOT: Right. The other reason was that she had a very good insect collection and I was kind of interested in collecting insects at the time too. I used to get a lot of information from that.

ARENA: She would allow you to come in and look at these things, say, when you were not in a regular class?

FLUTOT: At recess.

ARENA: Were there others who would do the same thing?

FLUTOT: Not while I was there.

ARENA: Would she more or less leave you on your own? You would go over to where these items were and look at them yourself?

FLUTOT: Yes.

ARENA: And you had an understanding that you could do that at any time?

FLUTOT: Yes.

ARENA: How about some of the other officials. Do you recall who the Superintendent of Schools for the area was at the time?

FLUTOT: No, I don't. Whoever it was, I never did see him.

ARENA: Were the school rooms and buildings, including even maybe the athletic fields that were there, were these ever used by the community as they are today for different affairs, say, even for Voting day, when one of the rooms was open for voting? Do you recall if the school was used for different purposes?

FLUTOT: I don't recall if it was. My folks' voting area was at a private person's house, so I don't know whether voting was at the school or not at the time.

ARENA: Do you recall if the school participated in any of the formal holidays? I'm thinking of Armistice Day or July 4th? Were there special programs involving the community when the school made a special contribution, and maybe even programs were held in the school auditorium for some of these holidays?

FLUTOT: I don't recall. As far as I know, there wasn't.

ARENA: Again, is there anything else that I have not mentioned concerning the East Whittier Elementary School period that you would like to mention before we move on?

FLUTOT: The school itself won many prizes for being the prettiest school in the state of California.

ARENA: I didn't realize that. How were these judged and what were the prizes?

FLUTOT: Just recognition. There weren't any physical prizes, just recognition as being the prettiest school in the state of California. It was a Spanish style; I guess you'd call it Spanish.

ARENA: And you say the buildings they have there now are not the original buildings at all, such as you show me here.

- FLUTOT: It was damaged beyond repair, safely, in 1926 when they had the big earthquake.
- ARENA: The one that was especially hard in Long Beach [California] was a bad one, I understand in 1933.
- FLUTOT: It was strictly a local earthquake, and the fault went up Gunn Road there. It didn't demolish the school, but they had to demolish it because it was unsafe to use.
- ARENA: Do you recall what the occasion was that day? Was it a school day and the students were in the school?
- FLUTOT: No. Fortunately, it was the summer after I graduated. It would have been 1926.
- ARENA: The year 1926 would have been the year the President started high school. That would have been the summer, June, 1926.
- FLUTOT: The summer of '26 that it got damaged. That's right. In the summer of 1930, after graduation from high school, there was another earthquake that damaged the high school and wrecked a lot of the buildings there.
- ARENA: The high school in this case?
- FLUTOT: Yes.
- ARENA: Now there seem to be a series of buildings. Would you say that the buildings of today don't look nearly as much like this original building here? They have the same style?
- FLUTOT: It's a similar style but not the same.
- ARENA: Right. It's not the same color. According to this, you had red tile roofs and white walls. And you certainly don't have that now.
- FLUTOT: It was just the one building.
- ARENA: Do you recall that the recognition was written up in newspapers, where the principal and the teacher would mention it to the students? Were you aware of this at the time, or did this come later?

FLUTOT: I don't recall now how I knew. Probably it was written up in the papers. I couldn't say for sure, or whether it was recognition that was hanging in the office of the school building. I don't know now. But I do know it was considered the prettiest building.

ARENA: Nothing of that remains at all now, no part of the building?

FLUTOT: Nothing left at all. Absolutely nothing.

ARENA: As we can see by looking at it, the grounds were certainly beautiful and you had a good blend of lawns and trees and shrubbery that blended in very nicely with the building itself. How can you account for the fact that such a beautiful building for such a small community did exist? Would it be fair to say that that reflects that the community was fairly prosperous, East Whittier at that time?

FLUTOT: Well, of course, Whittier always has been fairly prosperous due to farming and later oil.

ARENA: During that time in U.S. history, especially after '29, of course--and that would have been while you were in school, that was before '29, but '29 on came the terrible depression years--is it your impression that the community suffered a great deal from the depression too? Teachers were let go and no new school buildings were put up and that sort of thing?

FLUTOT: I didn't notice it too much because I was in high school then. My father had a job all the time so we didn't really suffer from it too much. We never were wealthy, rich, or anything like that.

ARENA: There was no problem about going on relief?

FLUTOT: Nothing like that.

ARENA: What do you recall about the community as a whole though? Did the community itself have people on relief?

BEGIN SIDE II TAPE I

ARENA: The last question dealt with the affects, from your recollection, of the depression years upon the Whittier community?

FLUTOT: There were some, of course, that were caught in the depression pretty badly. I don't recall anyone on relief or getting relief that way. They were poor and cut down on a lot of stuff. One of the neighbors who didn't live there had a ranch near us--he lived in San Pedro [California]--came to his little house on the ranch there and shot himself because of the depression.

ARENA: I imagine that made the newspapers and was common knowledge among the residents.

FLUTOT: Yes.

ARENA: Now, we'll get on to the high school period, which is paralleling this in a way. You started in the fall of 1926 at Whittier High School. As we mentioned earlier, the President started at Fullerton High [School]. Do you recall his ever mentioning to you, say, during the end of that elementary year, the eighth grade, that he was intending to go to Fullerton and why he chose to go there rather than Whittier High School? Do you recall that coming up?

FLUTOT: No, that never came up. I don't recall. . . . Of course, high school was a little different than grammar school. We were more or less together, whereas in high school, of course, you go from class to class. Getting the same class together was rather remote sometimes.

ARENA: Do you recall that you had any of the same classes with him?

FLUTOT: I just don't recall any class that I had with him in high school at all. Meeting him in the hallways and stuff like that, but I don't recall ever having the same class.

ARENA: There is no doubt that he recognized you, even though you were away two years like that. You would continue to be in the store, I guess, and see one another that way?

FLUTOT: Things were a little different, probably.

ARENA: Do you recall that he played football for Fullerton and was in some games; and do you possibly recall attending any of these games in which he played high school football?

FLUTOT: Not that I recall. I was never too much of a sports fan.

ARENA: Now, although you didn't see the President play football for Fullerton, did you happen to know if he played football on the Whittier High team, or at Whittier High when he did come? Fix these dates in your mind, it might help out. He was there for the last two years, which means he came in '28; then you have the school year '28 and '29, and then '29 and '30. He graduated as you did in 1930. Do you recall those last two years beginning '28-'29 that you saw him play in any sports?

FLUTOT: No, I can't say that I did.

ARENA: Was there a sign, on this level, that he was doing good in school work, that came to your attention? Do you recall seeing his name in any connection in academic excellence?

FLUTOT: Yes. Of course, he was on debate teams and scholarship deals.

ARENA: There was a scholarship society which was open to top students. Were you aware that he was a member of that?

FLUTOT: Yes, because we'd have an auditorium now and then and he'd be right up there with them.

ARENA: Now that we've mentioned auditoriums and assemblies, the auditorium programs, what do you recall about those assemblies? What were the programs like? Would the teacher introduce a student or would a student actually be in charge, in some cases, of the entire program?

FLUTOT: The student body would be in charge and give whatever is to be given at that particular time, whether it was a program or whether it was a school activity, whatever it would be. There would be a time when the student body was not there, but it was something special then. Normally it would be the student body up there.

ARENA: What do you recall about his presence on the stage? Did he seem nervous at that time in any way? Did he read prepared speeches regarding the program, or was this a period where he spoke without looking at notes, just took charge of the program, without necessarily reading everything from papers?

FLUTOT: He was never nervous as far as physical signs went. I don't recall him ever reading, using or looking at notes.

ARENA: Could he be heard clearly from wherever you sat at that time?

FLUTOT: Oh, yes, very easily.

ARENA: Do you recall ever sitting in the rear of the auditorium possibly?

FLUTOT: Each year we had a certain place to sit. We had certain seats we had to sit in. The senior year, of course, would be in the front, and the junior year towards the back, the sophomore on the side and the freshmen on the other side. Depending on what year you were is where you sat.

ARENA: On the question of being in the assemblies, he was probably in the assemblies also because of his election to class offices. I believe he was the manager in one year. This took in managing funds for athletics and other student activity programs. Do you recall his speaking to the student body in this category as a student-elected representative?

FLUTOT: Not really.

ARENA: Or campaigning for the different student government positions? Do you recall anything like that?

FLUTOT: Not that I can say definitely yes.

ARENA: Do you recall talking with him personally about his interest in student government, or his coming up to you on an occasion and asking you to vote for him, by the way, during any of the period you knew him in high school?

FLUTOT: No, nothing like that.

ARENA: How was the voting conducted, if you recall that? Did the students write these on ballots?

FLUTOT: I just don't recall now offhand.

ARENA: Now, on the question of the debating activities, do you recall attending some of the debates in which the President participated, and would you describe them?

FLUTOT: He was very forceful. Yes, I remember quite a few. He was very forceful and very convincing, a very good speaker.

ARENA: Do you recall what some of the subjects would have been in which he debated?

FLUTOT: No.

ARENA: Were these debates with other schools, where they would come and visit Whittier High and debate there? Or were these the type that you attended, or were these among the students of Whittier High itself?

FLUTOT: Just the students.

ARENA: Did he clearly stand out among the other debaters, or do you think he stood out because you knew him personally, from the standpoint of excellence with the others?

FLUTOT: Well comparing it--that's a loaded question.

ARENA: It is. It could be both ways. In other words, he clearly stood out, you recall?

FLUTOT: That's true.

ARENA: He really was more than a match for the others.

FLUTOT: In comparing him to others, he really stood out.

ARENA: But you were aware, of course, that you had known him, and that sticks in your mind too? You knew that he wasn't just another debater up there, but he was a person whom you had known personally?

FLUTOT: Of course, a personal friend, you're sort of tied together closer than someone else, but then I wouldn't say that that was too much the reason for making him outstanding.

ARENA: Now do you recall seeing or hearing him when he entered oratorical contests which were different than the debating setup? Do you recall any of those occasions where he entered oratorical contests?

FLUTOT: Well, yes and no. Way back I can visualize some of the oratorical contests.

ARENA: But they don't stand out in your mind?

FLUTOT: Not to the point where I could say definitely anything about them.

ARENA: How about graduation ceremonies, the commencement exercises? Did he read a particular speech or deliver a particular address on this occasion that stands out in your mind?

FLUTOT: Not that I recall, no.

ARENA: How about the period following graduation from high school? Did you ever have any personal contact with him since then, going right up to the present, including the political years? Did you hear him speak in this area when he came for political campaigns, as well as appearing when he was a lawyer?

FLUTOT: Unfortunately, I never had any contact after we graduated from high school. I'd like to.

ARENA: Were you aware, for example, that he did go into law? Were you aware at that time that he had become a lawyer?

FLUTOT: Oh, yes.

ARENA: How about his acting in plays? Did you ever see him in plays? You mentioned one in elementary school. How about on the high school and college level?

FLUTOT: I don't recall ever seeing him in a play, to tell you the truth.

ARENA: After that elementary period. Or the Community Players where he met Mrs. Richard Nixon, by the way. There is no recollection of these plays that you attended?

FLUTOT: No recollection.

ARENA: Is there anything concerning the high school years that I have left out that you would like to bring up? By the way, do you happen to know a Mr. [Thomas J.] Phelan who was the athletic instructor at that time?

FLUTOT: Yes.

ARENA: What would you say about him, since I will be interviewing him, and since I can't ask the President directly about him, I'd like to see what you recall about him? If he taught any subjects in addition to being an athletic teacher?

FLUTOT: I never had him directly as a teacher, or even as an athletic teacher, except as substitute. Of course, I knew him and knew of him.

ARENA: Was he easy to get along with? Did the students enjoy him?

FLUTOT: Yes. As far as I know, he got along with everybody real nicely.

ARENA: Did Whittier High, in your estimation, have a full athletic program?

FLUTOT: Oh, yes.

ARENA: Would gym be every day as well as the formal sports outside of the classroom?

FLUTOT: Physical education was every day, rain or shine. My athletic endeavors were mostly in the track end of it.

ARENA: Do you happen to know if the President participated in track or anything besides--if he did--football on the high school level?

FLUTOT: Unfortunately, all the four years he was never in the same physical education period.

ARENA: Is there anything else regarding this high school period? For example, did you come into contact with him while he was working anywhere during the high school period, except the store, which we'll take up separately later? Do you know if he had any other jobs where you might have seen him at work?

FLUTOT: No.

ARENA: Just to be sure, wasn't there something like manual training or sloyd on the program at Whittier High, and do you know if he took that?

FLUTOT: I don't think he did. I'm not sure, but I don't think he did. I took woodshop--they called it woodshop then--and I took autoshop, but he wasn't in any of my classes.

ARENA: He was, no doubt, taking a pre-college course, as he eventually went on to law school. Could that have made a difference? Were you not taking a pre-college course, or did they not have as serious a distinction at Whittier High when you attended?

FLUTOT: Well, they did to a certain extent. He took more of the academic lines.

ARENA: Latin, for example. He took a lot of languages.

FLUTOT: Mine was more on the technical training. I was more on that end of it.

ARENA: With the possibility that if you wanted to go on to school for the so-called B.S. [Bachelor of Science] degree rather than the A.B. [Bachelor of Arts], the technical subjects would have suited you for that.

FLUTOT: I took all the math they had and all the science they had.

ARENA: Do you mind if I ask you if you did go on to college after high school?

FLUTOT: Unfortunately, it was during the period of the depression then too. We just couldn't swing it. But I did go to technical school.

ARENA: The math and science that you took were the same as the college prep courses, as far as you recollect?

FLUTOT: Yes.

ARENA: If you had done well in those, there's no doubt you could have done well in college too. Whittier High School had a good reputation. Was there any attention concerning the beauty of Whittier High School buildings that were similar to the awards that were received by the East Whittier Elementary School?

FLUTOT: Nothing like that. I don't think Whittier High was really that attractive. It was just strictly practical buildings.

ARENA: At the time you attended, the new auditorium had not been built, I believe.

FLUTOT: No, it was the old one right in front there.

ARENA: And it still is there now, I understand, maybe used as a library there today, the Whittier High School library.

FLUTOT: I don't know. I haven't been there for so long, I don't recall.

ARENA: Would you happen to be on hand whenever there were PTA meetings? Sometimes students help out their parents in different rooms. I was just wondering if possibly you recollect something like that, the President's parents being in the vicinity of the school while you were there also.

FLUTOT: No. There again I don't recall ever being with the PTA or my folks being with the PTA at the high school, that is, attending any of those places. I never went. Of course, the children don't go to the PTA meetings, as far as that goes, even now.

ARENA: Unless there might have been some programs involving them, where maybe they had some special entertainment. One I attended recently that was the case, the student choir performed. Speaking of the choir, by the way, do you happen to know if either you or the President were together in that sense

in any way? Were you ever in any choirs together, or did you play a musical instrument and maybe get together that way with him?

FLUTOT: No. I didn't take any music in high school at all.

ARENA: Do you recall seeing him play musical instruments or singing in choirs at any level, going back even to the elementary and then the high school, all the way through?

FLUTOT: No.

ARENA: Were you aware he was taking music lessons, by the way, piano in particular?

FLUTOT: Piano, yes. They had a piano at their house.

ARENA: Do you recall seeing him perform, ever?

FLUTOT: I wouldn't say perform. He'd play on the piano while we were there, but I wouldn't call it a performance or anything.

ARENA: But you did see him do that, see him when he wasn't playing anything formal?

FLUTOT: Yes.

ARENA: Were you an acquaintance of the President when he was sent to learn how to play the piano with an aunt, Mrs. [Jane] Beeson in Lindsay [California], and he left school for a while and registered and lived some six months during the school year up in Lindsay? The idea was to learn to play the piano, but at the same time he had to attend school up there. Did you happen to know him during that period when he left school for a while? This would have been during elementary years, probably '25 or '26.

FLUTOT: Not really. There might have been a period there. I couldn't say for sure.

ARENA: Concerning these high school years, and speaking about the school in particular, is there anything I have not brought up concerning the President and yourself that you would like to mention at this point? Maybe school picnics, maybe some field trip to Los Angeles or some unusual guest, unusual programs?

FLUTOT: No. Nothing like that that I can think of.

ARENA: Do you recall reading about him while you were in high school, the debates, his winning of the oratorical contest? Does that come to mind, or your parents talking about him that way?

FLUTOT: I don't recall any discussions of any sort.

ARENA: Of course, after high school he went on to Whittier College and, I presume, there is no direct contact with him, but was there ever any indirect contact between you and the President during the college period? His Whittier College period was 1930 to 1934. And then law school at Duke [University] in North Carolina was 1934 to 1937.

FLUTOT: No. No contacts there at all.

ARENA: Now, going to the period when you knew him and the family and the grocery store that they operated, and also the gasoline station, at what is now the intersection of Santa Gertrudes [Avenue] and Whittier Boulevard, did you know all of the members of the family?

FLUTOT: Yes, definitely.

ARENA: Including the two brothers who have died. One was Harold [Samuel Nixon] and the other was Arthur [Burdg Nixon].

FLUTOT: I can't recall Arthur.

ARENA: Arthur was a youngster . . .

FLUTOT: I know of him, but I just can't recall him at all. I knew Harold, of course, and Don [Francis Donald Nixon]. Edward [Calvert Nixon] was born later.

ARENA: Right. 1930. When you were graduating from high school. What do you recall about Harold, the oldest son, by the way? You probably know he was sickly and the family had to move--not the family but the mother--and he would go to a different climate for health's sake.

FLUTOT: Of course, I remember him considerably before that too. When they put the gas station up, he ran that.

- ARENA: You recall his working around the store then?
- FLUTOT: Yes. Harold had charge of the gas station, and Don to a certain extent. I don't recall Richard ever working at the gas station though.
- ARENA: What did work at the gas station consist of actually, just selling gas, or was it also tire-changing, giving people grease jobs and changing oil and so forth?
- FLUTOT: As I remember the gas station, it wasn't really what they have, the picture of a gas station now. It was just a couple of pumps out in front of a little building connected to the store. They'd change tires, yeah. I guess they did grease jobs too, but I don't recall.
- ARENA: But the main idea was the sale of gas. Was it your impression that Harold was as studious as the President? Could he have gone on to college, you think, if he had lived?
- FLUTOT: Well, I don't recall academically how studious he was. No, I don't recall.
- ARENA: Did you ever, by the way, if it is not too personal, go out on dates with any of the brothers, any double-dating or possibly entertain the girls going to a movie, or go to any birthday parties where there was social contact with him?
- FLUTOT: I don't recall going on any dates of any sort. Of course, birthday parties--we exchanged our own birthday parties with the families. If he had a birthday, I'd go over there. If I had a birthday, he'd come over to our house.
- ARENA: Whose birthday parties? You mean all the boys, all the Nixon sons?
- FLUTOT: No. When I went over to the Nixon place for his birthday or whatever it was.
- ARENA: And it is President Nixon whose birthday party you do recall attending. How would you describe it? What was there in the way of food, of course, or was it the typical

cake and ice cream? Was food served? Where was it held, outside or inside the home, the living room? About how many were present and, again, was there any entertaining by the President?

FLUTOT: That sort of slips, I don't recall. It was at their home, at his home.

ARENA: It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say, but was it an unforgettably wild affair, anything like that? It wasn't the type of party where there would be a lot of noise, a lot of activity?

FLUTOT: No, just a regular kids' party.

ARENA: Were there both boys and girls, do you recall?

FLUTOT: I don't recall if there were any girls or not.

ARENA: Now, will you describe your party which the President attended at your home? How was that held?

FLUTOT: When you say party, it was just strictly for very close friends, you know. It wasn't really what they have now, fifteen or twenty kids coming. Just the family and one or two other families.

ARENA: Would it be the entire family; would the parents of the children come; would there be a supper or would it just be the cake?

FLUTOT: Oh, just ice cream, coffee and cake. You'd make your own ice cream, churn it. There was nothing spectacular.

ARENA: How about the question, though, about the President's parents? Would they have come along with him, do you recall? Was it necessary for them to bring him because of the distance and, therefore, they were there?

FLUTOT: Yes. You'd have to travel by car to get from one place to another.

ARENA: How many miles was your place from the grocery store where the President's family lived?

FLUTOT: I would say about three miles.

ARENA: And it wasn't likely that he walked when he came?

FLUTOT: No.

ARENA: If you don't mind my asking, speaking about contact with the President--we've mentioned your contact on the school level--was there any on the religious level? Did you attend his same church by any chance?

FLUTOT: No. No contact that way.

ARENA: Nor, say, religious classes like Sunday School?

FLUTOT: No, no Sunday School.

ARENA: How about playing and recreation at any level, from the standpoint of the elementary years all the way through, through to the present? But this would be mainly the elementary years. Did you play in the school yard and around your individual homes, or were there some big empty lots where the boys could play soccer, football, baseball, and this is away from the school environment? The sort of games you played on your own.

FLUTOT: No. Of course, that's all there was, fields.

ARENA: And there were fields that were not in use during part of the year when the crops weren't grown?

FLUTOT: Or the roads. Probably two or three cars a day would go by so you'd have plenty of time to play in the road.

ARENA: You recall playing with the President this way?

FLUTOT: Yes.

ARENA: Were you aware that, does it come to mind, that he would not play as much as the other boys around that time?

FLUTOT: That is true.

ARENA: You recall that distinctly?

FLUTOT: I recall that distinctly.

ARENA: You recall that he would leave to go back to his books or wherever he went? Or he would come out late and play while you fellows would already have your games in progress?

FLUTOT: It would depend on the conditions.

ARENA: Let me ask you. On the average, would you fellows get together every day after school and play or would it be a couple of days out of the week, and would it be before supper and after supper?

FLUTOT: After school we had chores to do and we had to get home and do the chores, and we didn't have time to play after school, that is. It would be either on Sunday or some time on some special day.

ARENA: So it definitely would not be a daily thing, playing every day after school?

FLUTOT: No.

ARENA: Do you recall any particular incidents that took place when you were playing with the President, possibly a fight, possibly some unusual event? Was there a tendency to pick captains when you picked sides, as was the custom in my day? Two fellows would do the picking, swap the bat, have different ways of picking teams. Did the President seem to be the leader in this sort of thing when that did take place, whenever you did play, is what I'm getting at I guess?

FLUTOT: Not really. Like I say, I never did see him get into any fight of any sort.

ARENA: You wouldn't say he was the best athlete? He doesn't stand out in your mind as an athlete as he does as a student?

FLUTOT: Not as an athlete, that's right.

ARENA: Would you say he was average or would you say that he was the last guy the two teams would pick, and would you have that situation?

FLUTOT: I don't know about being the last guy, but I don't believe they would pick him as being the first, that would be the top athletic person.

ARENA: Do you remember the name of some of those fellows you did play with in your neighborhood when the President participated also, who was an outstanding fellow? Was there an [John] Arambide, for example?

FLUTOT: I was just going to mention that name, and you mentioned it first.

ARENA: He lived in your neighborhood?

FLUTOT: Yes. That's right.

ARENA: Because he did go on to college and did very well in athletics there. I'm looking forward to interviewing him some day. How would you describe Arambide, and how about his first name, do you recollect that?

FLUTOT: I think it was Johnny, wasn't it?

ARENA: How far did he live? Was he within this three mile range that you fellows would get together?

FLUTOT: Yes, probably. It's hard to say just exactly.

ARENA: If I'm not mistaken, weren't his parents from Spain, possibly the Basques?

FLUTOT: Probably were.

ARENA: Did you ever happen to meet his parents?

FLUTOT: No, I never did meet his parents.

ARENA: But when he played, as you recollect distinctly, he was outstanding?

FLUTOT: He was an athlete, yes.

ARENA: Were there others like Arambide that come to mind?

- FLUTOT: Well, I can't recall the names. You mentioned the name and I was just about ready to say it.
- ARENA: How about ever attending big football games--well, there wouldn't be any league games of baseball at that time in California--but any of the college teams in Los Angeles, USC [University of Southern California]? Do you recall ever attending any of these with the President? As a matter of fact, did any of the boys in your neighborhood in your time, either junior high or high school level, ever get to see some of the really big games?
- FLUTOT: No.
- ARENA: What would the reason be, too expensive, or it would take too much time, or the family wouldn't tie up the car?
- FLUTOT: Of course, it could have been all of those. Transportation would be one of the things, and time, getting time off to do that kind of stuff.
- ARENA: When you did play, whether it was that Saturday or that Sunday with the fellows including the President, would it be an all day thing or would it be all morning or all afternoon? Did your chores allow you to spend a whole day, maybe taking time to go back home for lunch?
- FLUTOT: Not a whole day, no. Two or three hours in the early afternoon.
- ARENA: Was there anything at that time like supervised sports such as Little League, or you fellows did this all on your own?
- FLUTOT: No. No organization at all.
- ARENA: How about bicycle riding? Did you fellows do that as sport or was that a regular thing to get back and forth to school?
- FLUTOT: Just to get back and forth to school.
- ARENA: How about swimming? Was there anything like a YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association] that you could take advantage of?

FLUTOT: Nothing that I recall except possibly in Whittier, and I don't even know if that was there then. Of course, East Whittier had no swimming pool. There was one at Whittier High, but that was too far away to go.

ARENA: How about inside games such as checkers, chess or table tennis? Do you recall participating in that and if you did, was that a lot less than playing outside together, that you did play inside, checkers and so forth?

FLUTOT: Playing inside games was strictly family stuff.

ARENA: You wouldn't go inside and play checkers with the President, we'll say, or he would go over to your house and do that?

FLUTOT: Not to play checkers, no. We had games that we played indoors. I don't recall what they were.

ARENA: How about cards?

FLUTOT: I don't recall playing cards.

ARENA: As a matter of fact, you probably might be aware that the Quakers frowned upon card playing, smoking and dancing. Bearing that in mind, did you ever see any card playing?

FLUTOT: No card playing.

ARENA: You, yourself, don't ever recall playing cards with the President?

FLUTOT: No. In fact, I don't even play now.

ARENA: Getting back--and this will be the final part of the interview--to the grocery store itself. Were you conscious of the first time the Nixons moved into the neighborhood and actually building their home and moving the old church, East Whittier Friends Church, to become a part of their property? Do you recall any of that, when they first moved into the area?

FLUTOT: I don't recall their moving into the area. It would be pretty hard to remember. I do remember them building their bigger home. It's not there now, none of those are now. They did build a nice home there. I remember that. It was in back of the store.

ARENA: What do you recall about the other members of the family? For example, let's begin with the head of the family, Mr. [Francis Anthony] Frank Nixon. How would you describe him.

FLUTOT: In what way?

ARENA: From the standpoint of an individual. Was he gruff? If you wanted to go to the store yourself, would you avoid him if he were the one doing the selling? No reflection on the man but just thinking back. Was he the type of person it was difficult to get along with as a youngster?

FLUTOT: Well, as far as I'm concerned he wasn't. I never had any problems. Of course, when I went there to buy anything, I was always with my parents.

ARENA: Do you recall if your parents paid cash, by the way, or were they also on the books?

FLUTOT: I believe they paid cash; I'm pretty sure.

ARENA: As far as direct dealing with Mr. Frank Nixon, that would be between your parents and him regarding the purchase of items?

FLUTOT: Yes.

ARENA: You don't recall being chased out of the store or anything like that? You don't recall your getting in the way when you and the boys were talking loudly or causing him to lose his patience?

FLUTOT: No, I never have.

ARENA: Did you ever see him lose his patience with the boys?

FLUTOT: I never did see him lose patience.

ARENA: You never saw him exercise discipline with any of the boys, you personally?

FLUTOT: No, I never did. Not while I was there anyway.

ARENA: Was there anything else about Mr. Frank Nixon that I haven't mentioned? For example, did you ever see him drive his car? Did he seem to be an impatient man? Did he seem to be a man who, when you saw him with other men, liked to argue politics, or was that obvious? Even at the time you were a young man, did you notice that he liked to argue politics with other men?

FLUTOT: No. I just don't recall that situation.

ARENA: How about Mrs. Hannah Nixon, the President's mother? Would you describe her?

FLUTOT: She was very friendly.

ARENA: Was she always working in the store? Whenever you went there, she would usually be there.

FLUTOT: Yes. I remember her making her pies and enjoying her pies.

ARENA: Any particular pie that she would be famous for, particular flavor?

FLUTOT: Well, my folks liked apples so we always got the apple pie.

ARENA: Do you recall the price of the apple pie?

FLUTOT: No, I don't.

ARENA: Do you recall if they were served in tins that she wanted you to give back, or that you had to return the tin?

FLUTOT: I believe they were in tins. I remember taking them back, but whether she actually insisted on it I don't recall.

ARENA: Do you recall that Mr. Frank Nixon did any of the baking or cooking?

FLUTOT: No.

ARENA: While you were there, was the restaurant set up so that you could eat in the part of the grocery store; was there a counter?

FLUTOT: No, no place to eat. When we first went there it wasn't very large, of course.

ARENA: Did you ever see the boys in the store or outside getting into an argument, including fighting--Donald or Harold or the President--and the parents coming out to break it up, or did they seem to be a family where you didn't have that sort of thing?

FLUTOT: From my personal recollection I don't recall any of them being in a fight.

ARENA: Do you recall ever eating with the family, and do you recall if grace was given before the meal, and who did it, if it was?

FLUTOT: No, I don't recall eating with them in that manner.

ARENA: Do you ever recall that the Nixons talked about any particular hardships, say business hardships, the question of health, the question of illness in the family? Do you ever recall anything personal like that coming up?

FLUTOT: Not to me personally. Of course, once in a while, listening in when talking to the parents with my mother and my father, they would discuss things like that but never to me personally.

ARENA: Looking over these different pictures that you have of the President in the East Whittier Elementary School, I notice he is not wearing overalls as a lot of the boys did. Did you ever see him wear overalls?

FLUTOT: No. I never saw Richard wear a pair of overalls any time.